

Keeping in step with the Spirit
Galatians 5:25

We have looked together a little bit at what Jesus was saying to us when he said, *"I am come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."* (Jn. 10:10)

We saw that if we are living that life more abundantly, it's because God has poured out His abundant grace, and comfort and love upon us to the point where we are to be abounding in every good work.

In order for that to take place, God is willing and desirous to fill us and empower us with His Holy Spirit, if we are willing to receive Him by ceding our control to Him and letting Him sit down on the throne of our lives.

Let's take a look now at Galatians 5:25.

"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

I see this verse saying two things to us which go hand in hand. First Paul tells us to *"live by the Spirit"* and secondly he tells us to *"keep in step with the Spirit."*

One concerns itself with our daily comings and goings as Christians. The second part is dealing with being lead by or directed by the Holy Spirit. And we can't have the second without the first.

If we want to be directed by, or if we want to keep in step with the Spirit, we must first be living by the Spirit. And living by the Spirit means we have owned up to the fact that we have sin in our life, asked Jesus to forgive us and accept Him and the Holy Spirit into our lives. We take Galatians 2:20 seriously where it says, *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."*

How do we know if we are living by the Spirit? What are the signs?

If we go back up a few verses to Gal. 5:16, Paul describes again briefly the struggle that we face between life in the Spirit and our life in our sinful nature, then he compares the two.

He says, *"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."* There's the solution. Simple. Paul says if we are struggling with our sinful nature, which includes a long list of things which we'll see in a moment, the solution is to live by the Spirit.

Does Paul tell us that we will be rid of the temptations that continually bombard our sinful nature, or that those horrible desires that we seem to have will go away? No. What he does say is that if we live by the Spirit, we will not gratify the desires of that sinful nature.

One of my favorite verses on this subject is 1 Corinthians 10:13. Here Paul tells us that, *"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."*

What a promise. Again, did he say that all those nasty temptations will go away or that those ugly desires will disappear? Not at all. What he does promise is that God is faithful all the time and more importantly

(when it comes to sin) that he will not allow a temptation to come to you that He knows would put you under.

Not only will He allow this temptation to come to us, but in His faithfulness and mercy and grace, He will also provide a way out so that we can stand up under it.

An expression that our Ivoirian friends often use in French when speaking of temptation is, "C'est trop fort!" It's too strong. No, - scripture tells us that it is not too strong. It'll be strong - but not too strong.

That's often an excuse that we use to allow ourselves to indulge in sin.

So, is it mind over matter? No, it's Christ over sin! Christ has defeated Satan and sin and has provided victory over sin. Not only has He defeated it, but He has given us His Holy Spirit and all His strength to remain in a state of victory.

That's what Paul talks about in Colossians 1:29 when he says, *"To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me."*

What is this struggle? Look again at Gal. 5:17.

"For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want."

So we have a tendency to say, "Yeah, see? I can't help it. It's a constant conflict, and Paul even says *I do what I don't want to do, or I don't do what I do want to do.*"

Paul doesn't let us get away with that. Isn't it interesting that this verse that we could use as an excuse, he surrounds with two verses, before and after, that take that excuse right away from us.

He says in verse 16 that if we live by the Spirit we will not gratify those desires. Then in verse 18 he says, *"But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law."* We are no longer bound by our sinful nature.

We'll come back to that thought in a minute, but let's take a look at how Paul describes this sinful nature and compares it to the life in the Spirit.

First of all in Galatians 5:19,20 Paul says that *"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like."*

He continues his list in Ephesians 4:29 - 31 :*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths,... Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*

Paul continues in 5:3-4: *But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or any kind of impurity or greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.*

Why? Why shouldn't we be involved in these kinds of things? Because Paul concludes each list with very strong statements.

In Galatians 5:21 he says, *"I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."*

And in Ephesians 5:5 he says something very similar: *"No immoral, impure or greedy person has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."*

Wow! That is awfully strong!

Paul, however, doesn't leave us on the negative side of things - all of the "thou shalt nots." People too often focus on the negative. When we think of the ten commandments, it's usually the "thou shalt nots" that first come to mind.

Look at what Paul says that we should focus on. In Galatians 5:22 he says, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."*

(One fruit- not plural)

Then he says something very interesting. He says, *"Against such things there is no law!"* You can do all those as much as you want!

But He's not done. No! Over in Philippians 4:8 he says, *"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - what does he say? think about such things."*

That's where our minds are to be focused.

Here's an exercise that we should all do all the time in everything that we do. There are often situations that we get into, opportunities that come before us and we wonder, "Should I do this? Should I watch this? Should I listen to this? Should I go in there?"

Maybe we've gotten to the point where we don't ask that anymore.

When questions like that come up, this list should pop into our mind. For example when we're looking for a movie to go see - how discerning are we? I'm afraid there are too many Christians that aren't discerning at all. Discernment often seems to be - "As long as it's not rated X."

Often the producers, when they write or produce a movie, seem to only have one list on the pad in front of them. They must look at it and say, "Well, let's see. I think this time we'll take a little bit of hatred and add some drunkenness, then throw in some jealousy, of course we have to put some obscenity and course joking in, oh, and to get our ratings up we can't forget to throw in a good dose of sexual immorality.

This kind of exercise can be done in everything that we do - in what we watch, what we read, what music we listen to, where we go, what friends we hang around with and even what we allow our minds to dwell on.

If I'm full of the fruit of the Spirit and if I'm thinking on the things that Paul suggests, I am free from all of this. I don't need to do this.

Instead of looking at the "sinful nature" list and thinking, "Wow, there's no way I can not do all of that," we should look at it in a different light. Our attitude should be, "Isn't this great! I'm free not to do this!"

Why can we say that? Because Paul says in Gal 5:24: *“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.”*

That’s why we can say that we are no longer bound by our sinful nature because Christ nailed all of those to the cross with Him. We need to leave them there.

A little while ago I said that it wasn’t “mind over matter” but “Christ over sin.” That’s true, for the most part, however, I believe that there is some mind over matter that takes place. It must be a conscious decision on our part that we are going to resist.

God always gives us a responsibility and expects us to be faithful to that.

James 4:7 *“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”*

The first part of the process is to submit ourselves to God. God won’t make us do that. Submitting ourselves to God is to have that personal relationship with Him that only remains as strong as the amount of time that we spend with Him in prayer and in His word. As we spend that time with Him, He will empower us by His Holy Spirit.

With that empowerment, when we are tempted to fall for the desires of our sinful nature or when we are faced with temptations from the exterior, we can resist it. That’s when we can do what James tells us, *“Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”*

Have you ever done that, literally? Have you ever said, “I resist you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Leave me right now!” Then choose the way out. It’s amazing what the results can be.

This is all part of walking in the Spirit.

A. B. Simpson says “If we would walk in the Spirit, we must recognize the Spirit as present and abiding in us. Let us recognize Him as having come and address Him as a present and indwelling friend.”

One of the reasons we don’t more frequently see or experience His power is because we try to turn it into the channels of our own wisdom instead of getting His mind, working in His will and even knowing that it needs to be Him working in and through us for anything to be accomplished.

In the book “Conspiracy of Kindness” talking about outreach projects, the author says, “I feel that if God is not clearly present in our projects, then we are wasting our time by essentially trying to flog a dead horse.”

In speaking about the vine and the branches, Jesus said that we could do nothing without him, but with him we would bear much fruit, fruit that would remain. (Jn 5:5,16)

If we would walk in the Spirit we must seek His will and then obey Him when He speaks. We must remember that the first part of obedience is to listen.

Many people seem to be trying to do it backwards. Intellectually we know that we have the power of the Holy Spirit. We quote verses like “I can do all things in Christ.” “It is no longer I that lives, but Christ that lives in me.”

But our attitude often seems to be, “So, what’s God waiting for? Why isn’t He working in and through me? Why isn’t He helping me ‘do all things?’ Why isn’t He blessing?”

In our minds we seem to be sitting back waiting for God to start working. If He would only do it, it would be a whole lot easier to be obedient to Him."

Or we want to make decisions in our committees as to what we want to do and where we want to go, then when we go ahead without seriously praying about it, we wonder what's wrong.

But if we are actively walking in the Spirit, He will direct us and expect us to be obedient to Him.

Remember in Acts chapter 5 (verses 25-32) when Peter was preaching the death and resurrection of Christ in the temple courts? The high priest said to him, "*We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name.*" You'll remember that Peter's answer was, "*We must obey God rather than men!*"

He then preached the death and resurrection to the high priest himself. He finished by saying, in verse 5:32: "*We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.*"

He knew that He was empowered by the Holy Spirit because he was walking in the Spirit, had been directed by the Spirit, and was being obedient to the Spirit.

He said to the High Priest, "*We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.*"

The very condition of His continual presence is obedience. Disobedience is sin, and continued unrepented-of sin in our lives goes back to the water in the glass example with the stones in it. We are no longer allowing the Holy Spirit to have full control in our lives.

But for those who seek continually to walk in the Spirit through repentance of sin and obedience to God's Word and a close communion with the Lord, Isaiah has this promise for us:

Isaiah 30:21 "*Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'*"

Isaiah also says that they who "*hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on the wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*" (Is. 40:31)

This is what God promises us. This is what God has offered to us. Do we want it? Do we want it enough to take the necessary steps? If we do, God tells us in Ezekiel 36:27 that, "*I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*"

Let's take Paul's encouragement to us seriously when he says, "*Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*" (Gal. 5:25)

We will not only see God do wonderful things in our lives, but we will see God do incredible things in our church.